



Baptist Historical Society of Queensland Newsletter

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PRESIDENT: Rev. Dr David Parker

26 Hall St Alderley Q 4051 Phone 356 9331

SECRETARY: Mrs. E. Chataway

11 Bunda St Slacks Creek 4127 Phone 208 2639

The Baptist Historical Society of Queensland announces its 1989 . .

A N N U A L P R E S E N T A T I O N

on

7.45pm Monday May 29

at

Baptist Theological College of Queensland

H E A R

Rev. S. W. Nickerson, M.A., B.Ed., B.D.

speak on

REV. T.J. MALYON, F.S.Sc.,

Founding Principal, Queensland Baptist College

(Please bring a plate for supper)

BAPTIST CHURCHES AND SOCIAL ISSUES
1919-1939

A report on recent research by Neville Buch

For many years, the history of Protestant churches in Queensland has been passed over. Certainly, there have been some anecdotal or denominational church histories written, which have their usefulness. But by and large, the history of Protestant churches remains unexplored territory. By the end of 1987, my colleague, Patrick O'Leary and I had opened up this territory a little more. Pat followed a biographical line of research in his work, "William Whale: The Makings of a Colonial Baptist Preacher, 1842-1903" This BA Honours thesis for the Department of History of the University of Queensland was an important contribution to the early history of Baptists in this state.

My thesis, "Protestant Churches and their Attitude to Public Issues in Queensland, 1919-1939" is a thematic study, covering three general areas. The first, contained in chapters 1 and 2, deals with the attitude of the churches towards public morality. It looks at issues such as the call for high standards in regard to sexual morality, the protest of the churches against gambling and their sabbatarian crusade against leisure activities on Sundays. Of particular concern for Baptist churches was the Prohibition Campaign to outlaw alcohol consumption in the state of Queensland. In 1920 and 1923, state-wide polls were held to decide the question of prohibition. It was during this time that Protestant churches campaigned for prohibition loudly and vigorously.

The Baptist church became active in this campaign through its involvement in the "Strength of the Empire" movement. This was an organisation established to protect the ethos of the British Empire against what it perceived as the threat against it, particularly sexually transmitted diseases and the alcohol trade. (See "Year Book of the Baptist Union of Queensland" 1919-20 p 46)

At these state-wide polls, electors had a choice of allowing the drink traffic to continue or of prohibition - i.e., to have a state ban on the liquor trade. There was also a third option - state control or socialization of the liquor industry. For the Baptist church, there was only one choice, as the Year Book of 1919-20 announced:

Baptists have always been in the van in the fight for freedom. The publicans are urging us to retain our liberty. Let us give good heed, and prove that 'liberty is not licence' by putting our X in the middle square [prohibition]. (p 48)

After defeat in the 1920 state poll, the Strength of Empire movement was reformed into the Queensland Prohibition League (the forerunner of the Queensland Temperance League). The Baptists, not to be outdone, increased their support for the new organisation. The church boasted in having a large percentage of the delegates in the 1921 GPL congress. The Baptist Assembly in that year urged its members to "leave no stone unturned to secure victory for prohibition." (Year Book 1921-2 p 44)

However, the Baptist church did not need the GPL to campaign against the liquor trade - it had its own Temperance Committee. How successful this was in reforming drinking habits is questionable. By its own admission, not much had been achieved, but for them what mattered was that they were in the fight, as the report of 1923 stated:

Your committee regret that more has not been accomplished than they have been able to show, but hope that the way will soon be open for them to take a stronger part against the powerful satanic influences which are opposed to them and to us all, as a part of Christ's Holy Church. (p 48)

The Baptist Church, as other Protestant churches, put much energy into trying to enforce this particular standard of morality because they feared that their heritage would be lost to the rising tide of secularism surrounding them. They were afraid that such changing standards and activities like "drinking with sinners" would entice their young people (the church of tomorrow) away from the sanctuary of church traditions. This is reflected in the presidential address of Rev. W.H. Wingfield to the Baptist Association in 1920:

I would remind you, in closing, that the future of our existence as a denomination depends upon this work [the church's ministry among youth] . . . Whether the dear old flag of Britain will continue to fly over an Empire on which the sun never sets, whether she shall be regarded as mistress of the seas and the greatest empire on God's earth . . . depend upon the training of the children of today. (Year Book 1920-1 p 24)

Wingfield's reference to a "dear old flag" and to an "empire where the sun never sets" reveals that the church clung to a tradition beyond the call of the gospel - and this leads me to the second theme of my thesis - that of the churches' view of the ideas and culture prevalent during this inter-war years.

As can be seen by Rev. Wingfield's statement, the churches clung to their colonial ties with the mother country. I argued in my thesis that while the Protestant Church opposed the socio-political ideologies of materialism, rationalism, spiritualism, communism and fascism, they decisively committed themselves to the socio-political idea of royalism, or rather, British imperialism.

This can be demonstrated in a number of ways. Firstly, at the beginning of this period, churches erected monuments or plaques inside church buildings. In all such places, the dedication was given to the empire and king. The Great War was interpreted by the churches as the defence of the British Empire. The churches, in commemorating the war, were proud of the sacrifice that their members had made for the Empire. For there was no other reason they could see in exalting the virtue of the war.

A second way that the churches' loyalties to an Imperial Society were expressed in the great deal of patriotic fervour shown at royalist occasions by denominational organisations. Such occasions, as the royal visit of the Duke and Duchess of York in 1927, King George V's Silver Jubilee and the mourning of a dead king followed by the coronation of a new one in 1936 saw the churches through their denominational journals exalt the reaffirmation of the principle of "divine right of kings" and the proclamation of its loyalty to the British throne.

My Baptist colleagues inform me that the Baptist Union at this time began to look toward an emerging American Baptist ethos through people like Rev. J.C. Farquhar. This may be so, however, I have found little evidence that such American connection had permeated the thinking of the representatives of the Baptist Union through their official publications. Such material

refers more to an English Baptist tradition, and there seems to be more travel and communication with the mother country than with the American cousins.

In fact, little is revealed outside the Anglo-Saxon protestant culture. We are certainly not made aware of what is happening among the German Baptist churches in the Lockyer, among the Danish Christian Association in Kangaroo Point, the Slavic Baptist Church in South Brisbane nor the Italian Baptist Church in North Queensland - all these non-British ethnic groups being represented in the Baptist Union of Queensland.

My last theme deals with the two most important issues of the inter-war period - the economic struggles in the midst of a depression, and the debates concerning World Peace and disarmament prior to the outbreak of the Second World War.

Two years after the Wall Street financial crash, the Baptist Church established a social service committee to provide denominationally organised help for those suffering from the effects of the depression. The work that this committee did was hindered by a narrow Calvinist social work philosophy. Firstly, organisational aid by the committee was seen as only a mere supplement to the individual church member's benevolence. Secondly, and more to the point, the churches were more concerned to provide for their own flock than providing for the community as a whole. In the first report, the social service committee laid down a policy that only Baptist church members would fall into the scope of the committee's work (Year Book 1931 p 64).

Even the work that the committee did for its Baptist constituency was somewhat pale in comparison to the great need people faced. Cakes and blankets formed most of the social service committee's giving. In 1931, the committee distributed 300 Christmas cakes; in 1933, it was 257! (Year Book 1931 p 64-5; Yearbook 1933) It also distributed blankets for winter, purchased directly from Ipswich Woollen Company. For the whole winter of 1931, the committee distributed only 8 pairs of double blankets, 4 pairs of three-quarter blankets and one rug. (Year Book 1933, p 64-5). From 1931 to 1933, only 15 pairs of blankets were distributed.

This could only have been a token gesture to fulfilling the great need faced by thousands of unemployed families. It was not the lack of Christian charity that prevented churches like the Baptists from responding adequately to the social and physical needs of the poor. No doubt there were many contributing reasons, but one certainly was the force of historical interpretations that had been built up on selective portions of Scripture. Holding dearly to the Protestant work ethic, the Baptist church in the inter-war period treated with deep suspicion any welfare work that went beyond supplementing people's meager resources or social legislation that addressed the causes of poverty. Simplistically, yet within this Calvinist tradition, individual sin was seen as the only cause of poverty, and only a repentant heart could bring one out of such a condition. Sentiments such as these were reflected in comments made in light of an address by the first Assembly of the Baptist Union of Australia. (Year Book 1925-6 p 25)

The research for my thesis ended up being somewhat incomplete. Church records were missing - such as several issues of the "Queensland Baptist." At times, what records exist remained silent on subjects of interest. Therefore, my thesis cannot be considered as a definitive study. More needs to be done, but hopefully it has at least opened up some interesting areas in the historical understanding of Protestant churches in Queensland, including the Baptist Union.

EXPLORING BAPTIST BRISBANE

A tour of important sites in Baptist witness around Brisbane

by David Parker
(revised edition)

With bi-centennial interest in our origins still high, it is interesting to realise that most of the important places associated with early Baptist life are located close to the central business district of Brisbane. So it is easy to visit them and to remember that they serve as reminders of God's grace and the zeal of our founders.

Here is a suggested car tour of these sites requiring only a short time to complete. It includes some optional extras for those with more time.

A convenient place to start is Alice Street, near the Gardens. Drive along George Street and notice Stephens Lane on the left, named after Thomas B. Stephens, a prominent early Baptist who operated a leather business on the right-hand corner of the lane fronting George Street. Opposite, on the corner of Charlotte Street, stood the "Moreton Bay Courier" office owned by another leader Baptist, James Swan from 1848 to 1859.

At the other end of Stephens Lane (it is now closed to traffic) to William Street, on the right-hand corner at the junction with William Street, stood the United Evangelical Church, which was erected in about 1850 as the place of worship for Baptist, Presbyterian and Congregational migrants who settled in Moreton Bay colony under a scheme organised by Rev. Dr John Dunmore Lang. They arrived in 1849 on the ships "Fortitude", "Chaseley" and "Lima" and formed the church immediately under the leadership of the pastor, Rev. Charles Stewart, a Baptist minister, who served until 1854. The building was in use until separate churches were formed. It was later used as the Electric Telegraph Office, and was demolished in the 1890s to make way for government building which now stands on the site.

Drive along Elizabeth Street, passing the rear of the General Post Office. The first united services and also the first Baptist services were held in the court buildings which occupied this site before the erection of the Post Office buildings in the 1870s. The first Baptist fellowship commenced in 1855.

Proceed via Eagle Street, along Wharf Street to the corner of Adelaide Street. The first Baptist chapel in Brisbane, known as Wharf Street Baptist Church stood where "4BC House" now stands. It was erected in 1859 by the builder, John Petrie, for 2050 pounds. The block of ground, which seemed almost too far from the town in those days, was sold to the church for 100 pounds by T.B. Stephens, a foundation member and later also the owner of the "Moreton Bay Courier" and successful politician. The first pastor was Rev. Charles Smith. Rev. Benjamin G. Wilson, who commenced his ministry in 1858 served with distinction until ill health caused his retirement in 1877. The chapel was used until 1890, when the building was sold for 165 pounds and the site for 16,000 pounds.

Turn left into Ann Street and pass the building at number 345, opposite All Saints' Church, the site of the first permanent Baptist Union headquarters 1960 to 1972. Continue along Ann Street pasted the front of the Central Railway Station. A church which broke away from Wharf Street was located at the Edward Street end from 1862 to 1866.

Continue to George Street, and then turn back into Turbot Street. As you

cross the overpass, look down to the left on Roma Street and the forum area. It was here in the town reservoir that the first baptisms took place in April 1857. They were conducted by Rev. James Voller, then of Bathurst Street church in Sydney. The candidates were James and George Grimes.

Turn left into Edward Street and crossing Wickham Terrace stop outside the City Tabernacle, a church listed with the National Trust. This imposing building was erected in 1891 at a total cost of 20,799 pounds, to replace the old Wharf Street building. The pastor was Rev. William Whale (1885-1903) a graduate of Spurgeon's College, London and perhaps the most outstanding churchman in Brisbane at the time. The church was a landmark for Brisbane until high-rise buildings began to obscure it. But it remains an important centre for Baptist life. For almost one hundred years it has served the needs of a large city congregation, noted especially for its strong preaching ministry.

But it has also been at the hub of Baptist Union life as well. It is the site of the annual Assemblies and many other Union functions. Its striking tower was the birthplace of the Baptist Theological College and its home for many years. The Ministers' Fraternal also used it for its meetings. A "time capsule" hidden in the base at the time of erection contains interesting documentation of life in the 1890s. The plaque on the right of the front doors also records the close connection between the church and the Christian Endeavour movement.

Proceed along Upper Edward Street and Leichhardt Street into Fortesque Street. On the right, near the site of International Computers (ICL) stood the Fortesque Street church from 1876. The fellowship disbanded in 1889 and the building was used at Nundah. Follow Fortesque Street through to Boundary Street and then to Gregory Terrace and turn left. The minister of Wharf Street church, Rev. Benjamin G. Wilson, lived in this fashionable area.

Follow Gregory Terrace and College Road right through and turn left into Hale Street, observing Petrie Terrace Church on the left, opposite Lang Park. This church was established in 1870 as an outreach from the Edward Street church, consolidating Sunday School and Band of Hope work commenced earlier. The ground was given by pioneer Baptist and first pastor, Rev. W. Moore. The first building was erected in 1869.

Turn right and follow Milton Road to the Toowong Cemetery for an extension of this tour. Here such people as Revs. B.G. Wilson, J. Kingsford (Jireh), Rev. W. Whale and first missionary, Miss Martha Plested were buried.

Return, or go directly, via William Jolly Bridge to Grey Street; South Brisbane passing near the South Brisbane Railway Station at the Expo site. The office building stands on the site of a Presbyterian Church where Rev. John Kingsford, founding pastor of the Jireh Church began his preaching ministry in Brisbane in 1861. The church was later re-located in Hampstead Road and named Park Church.

Diverge along Montague Road to Gray Road observing at Number 55 the first home of the Baptist College in a building, now demolished, given by Mr and Mrs E. Humphrey in 1939. The site was used until 1973 when the new campus at Brookfield was opened.

Rejoin the original route along Vulture Street, noticing Sommerville House on the right. The boarding section of this school was the family home of T.B. Stephens, benefactor of the Wharf Street church. He was also active in local government representing South Brisbane and was mayor of Brisbane. Continue along Vulture Street and pass South Brisbane Church on the left.

This church was founded in 1872 on land bought by T.B. Stephens. It was not one of the original members of the Baptist Union formed in 1877, but two of its pastors served as principals of the College. They were Rev. William Bell and Rev. Thos. C. Warriner.

Continue along Vulture Street, turning left cross the Story Bridge and come to Gipps Street, Fortitude Valley. The former Jireh Baptist Church stood above the street on the right until it was destroyed by fire in 1987, although it was not in use as a church in later years. It was formed as a Particular Baptist Church with members from Wharf Street in 1862, and in turn fostered numerous churches, including Windsor Road (1876), Albion (1882) and Nundah (1886). The building was erected in 1862, being designed by the eminent local architect, Benjamin Backhouse. It was classified by the National Trust in 1970. The fellowship ceased operation in 1978, its name being perpetuated in the church at Centenary.

Unless you decide to take the supplement mentioned next, this brief tour can end by traveling to the Queen Street mall, sipping coffee and remembering that the Kingsford Drapery stood near the site of Coles. R.A. Kingsford was a foundation member of Wharf Street, and an interim lay pastor. He was also later a mayor of Brisbane and a member of Parliament. His brother John was the first pastor of Jireh and served in that position for no less than 37 years.

However, for an interesting extension to this tour, proceed along Gipps Street to St Paul's Terrace, and follow it to the rear of the Exhibition Grounds. Notice that it was in this hollow that Lang's immigrants were forced to set up their camp when the government refused to provide them with the anticipated assistance. Follow Sandgate Road to Toombul Shopping Town. Go through to the back and drive along Walker's Way to Hedley Avenue. This is the "Zion's Hill" area where the Gossner Missionaries from Germany settled in 1838. Even before the colony was opened to free settlement, they were beginning to work among the local aborigines. Their Christian connections are reflected in names like Zion's Hill and near-by Kedron Brook named by them in honour of biblical places. When the missionary work failed, these pioneers turned to other pursuits, and associated themselves with various churches, including the Baptists. Several are buried in the Nundah Historical Cemetery on Hedley Avenue.

Follow Sandgate Road through Nundah shopping centre and turn left at the junction with Bages Road. In the little park stands a dignified granite memorial to these first free settlers, listing their names, some of which are commemorated in local street names like Rode Road, Gerler Road and Franz Road. The Nundah Church is a little way up Bages Street on the left.

On the return journey, detour to the left from Sandgate Road along London Road and Alexandra Road to the Clayfield Baptist Church. The chapel which had been used at Zion's Hill was re-erected at the back of this property in about 1874. The site itself had been donated by one of the Gossner missionaries, F.T. Franz, for this purpose. Further along Alexandra Road stands Clifford House, the Baptist Aged Persons' Home, whose sale has recently been announced. This work commenced at the stately Farrington House in David Street, Alderley in 1949 which was used until its sale in 1956 ready for the move to more suitable premises at Ascot.

As you travel back to the city, pause to thank God for "the great cloud of witness" who have laboured before us, and dedicate yourself again to follow "Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" in our own day. (Hebrews 12:1,2)

HISTORIC THANKSGIVING SERVICE AT MARBURG

by Dick Scanlan

The Marburg Baptist Church brought to a conclusion 117 years of witness on Sunday October 30, 1988 when a special thanksgiving service was held. The presiding minister was Rev. Angelo Giovas, pastor of the Minden Baptist Church.

The congregation was told that the work had first commenced in Marburg in December 1871 when worshipers met in the home of Mr Wilhelm Hohnke. A slab building was later constructed for worship, and the weather-board building, still in use was built in 1905.

In 1872 the church had a membership of 42, but within five years it had grown to 113 and later increased to 120.

Up until about 1925, this church had been one of a group of six churches known as the Conference of German Baptist Churches in South Eastern Queensland. They were Kalbar, Marburg, Minden, Tarampa, Blenheim and Tent Hill. By 1930, these churches had all transferred their allegiance to the Baptist Union of Queensland.

With the advent of the motor car in recent times, the Marburg church found itself in strong competition with sister churches as Minden and Rosewood. Owing to the fact that membership had become greatly reduced, it was reluctantly decided to close this work down.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church is currently holding services in the building, but ownership will be retained by the Baptist Union of Queensland.

An estimated 100 people were present to give thanks for those who had maintained a faithful witness over the past 117 years. In his opening remarks, Rev. Giovas said that in some ways it was a sad day, but he assured the congregation that God's purposes are greater than man's.

"We are not a separate entity," he said, "we are always part of the larger body." He went on to wish the Wesleyan church well in its future Christian witness in the building.

During the service which followed, a response was given by Mr Percy Muller on behalf of the West Moreton Baptist Association and a vocal duet was presented by Brian and Jill Kickbush. Rev. Reg Neibling, pastor of the combined churches of Marburg, Minden and Tarampa from 1958 to 1965 then gave the closing address.

He said that the unfading word of God comes to us with a clear message. "If we confess that Jesus is Saviour and Lord, and believe in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead, we will be saved."

Mr Neibling went on to say that the closure of the work may give challenge and opportunity to someone else. "The mantle worn by the Marburg Church now passes to other Christians," he said.

Proceedings were brought to a close when the congregation was invited to partake of luncheon provided by the ladies.

"HENRI NIELSEN, THE MAN AND HIS MINISTRY"

A review of an appreciation

by Ellen Chataway

Written by his son, the late Caldwell Nielsen of Boonah, this tribute*, (bearing the above title) reveals something of the measure of this man's abandonment to the Christ he served. Born of Danish parents in 1881, the young Henri grew up in Bundaberg. His early Christian training was with the Plymouth Brethren, being converted at age seventeen, baptised at eighteen. Lacking even a Bible College training, he was nevertheless steeped in the Word of God through association with Bible study groups and the continuing influence of godly parents.

The respected name of Nielsen was associated with Boonah from February 1903, when at the age of 22, Henri accepted a position in one of the hardware firms in the town. Involvement in Christian work with several of the churches and the Brethren further consolidated Nielsen's gifts as preacher and teacher. Many people traveled quite long distances on horseback or buggy to hear him preach.

Having married Mary Edmondson of Bundaberg, he began what was to become a twenty-seven year ministry as pastor of the Boonah church in 1912. Now a partner in the firm of Wilkie and Nielsen, he continued in business and did not receive a stipend. There continued to be strong links between the churches at Kalbar and Boonah, but the aged Pastor Carl Kreuger found it increasingly difficult to fulfill his preaching appointments at Boonah. By 1917, the Boonah church became autonomous.

Signs of increasing growth were soon apparent. Well attended services, including Sunday School and Bible Classes meant the church building had to be extended. Pastor Nielsen, still a young man, often presented a special series of addresses, using visual aids in the form of large charts and one huge canvass, the latter to show the journey of the Israelites to Canaan. The preacher seldom used notes in the pulpit. Son Caldwell states his father was a master of Biblical exposition, particularly with relation to the Old Testament. He possessed marvellous memory and had a good voice for singing and speaking.

Few churches had baptisteries then - impressive baptismal services were held notwithstanding at the Stump Hole. The first baptismal service held in the Boonah Church after a baptistery was installed saw a number of worshippers having to remain outside the building.

Mr Nielsen placed great emphasis on the Bible class. Later many of the former students expressed great gratitude for the training received. This preacher's manner of conducting the communion services must also be mentioned. These were communion services from the singing of the first hymn through to the end. The messages were intensely devotional, concerning God's love and our Lord's sacrifice on the cross. They were never boring, but a time when all felt the closeness of God's presence.

Travel at first was by sulky with a borrowed horse. Later, a light buggy, and at times on horseback until the Model T Ford and successive "wheels" made distance far less formidable. Given that Mr Nielsen preached at a variety of churches by invitation, including Kalbar, Charlwood, Aratula and Kulgun, he must have had a strong constitution to cope with the travel in such circumstances. These were all Baptist churches, but he also conducted services in other denominations - Methodist, Salvation Army and Congrega-

tional. He was a guest speaker at some of the Queensland Baptist Assembly meetings, at the Tamborine Conventions, and Ipswich Central Church to mention just a few of his "further afield" commitments.

Mr Nielsen assisted with the two great baptismal services in 1919 when a total of fifty-three candidates were immersed. The largest communion service ever held in the Kalbar Church followed the second baptismal service when 230 met around the Lord's Table. One senses the power through prayer of these country churches during Mr Nielsen's long ministry. Cottage prayer meetings were held during those year, under the auspices of Boonah Baptist Church.

The Coleyville Baptist Church became an outstation of Boonah during those heady days. Mr Nielsen travelled 22 miles on horseback to preach in the afternoon, returning home late into the evening. Coleyville was later taken over by the Kalbar Church, but returned after a time to the oversight of the Boonah Church. The advantages of a new church building in 1927 designed by the pastor were recognized, particularly with the advent of electricity.

His was a wide parish, and he did not neglect the smaller country churches. Charlwood appear to have been especially near to his heart; from its ranks at least three men later entered the ministry.

Whilst Kalbar was the venue for the once famous Christian Endeavour Conventions, starting in 1925, it is said that Mr Nielsen was the driving force behind them initially. Through his influence, the conventions were held along Keswick lines. For many who came as delegates, these days of challenge, inspiration and fellowship transformed their lives. The theme then was "Oneness in purpose and oneness in Christ."

Having served as honorary pastor of the Boonah Baptist Church for 27 years, Mr Nielsen retired in 1940. This extract from an "illuminated address" by church members states ". . . your fearless declaration of the whole counsel of God, together with your untiring zeal and devotion to the your Lord, has, by His Spirit, brought us from the place of small beginnings into a large place indeed, both honourable and blessed."

An appropriate tribute, indeed, to the life of Henri Nielsen.

(*Thanks is expressed Mrs E. Keith, Mrs Wyn Nielsen and Pastor G. Armitage for making available to the BHSQ the unpublished manuscript of this tribute.)

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